

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - The Obama White House is fond of saying that there's no "Mission Accomplished" banner for any given issue that they're turning a page on. It's a reference to when President Bush, in 2003, stood on the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln with just such a banner on the tower behind him while he declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq.

Early Thursday morning (Iraq time), more than seven years after that speech, the last combat brigade left Iraq. On Aug. 30, Operation Iraqi Freedom officially comes to an end.

There was no fanfare at the Iraq-Kuwait border as the 4th Stryker Brigade crossed the border. On MSNBC, the only embedded network capable of broadcasting the moment live, commentators Keith Olbermann, Rachel Maddow and Chris Matthews marked the moment while questioning why this nation invaded that country in the first place.

In a recent Gallup poll, some 53 percent of Americans say the war will ultimately be judged a failure. But support for the troops who served there seems unwavering.

"Our troops have served with distinction in Iraq, carrying out the mission and objectives given to them," Rep. Jim Oberstar said, echoing that dichotomy. "Unfortunately, they were following a flawed strategy laid down by the Bush Administration."

"In the end, there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and it did not turn out to be the hot bed of Al Qaeda activity that the previous administration believed it to be. I am glad to see that President Obama kept his word to draw down our troop presence there, so we can focus on a strategy for Afghanistan that stabilizes the region and makes America safer."

"This is a bittersweet moment for anyone who feels, as I do, we were misled into this war," agreed Sen. Al Franken. "So many of our young men and women fought and died with incredible honor and dedication. It's our job now to make sure that those who return get what they need from us. It's now the job of the Iraqi people to build a functioning society for themselves."

Republicans like Rep. Michele Bachmann struck a more positive tone.

"As the men and women of our United States forces complete their combat mission, we honor the seven and a half years they've protected our liberties. We thank all members of the military for their dedication to defend our nation."

It's important to note that U.S. involvement in Iraq is far from over. Some 50,000 troops remain in that country, training Iraqi troops, overseeing contractors and generally supporting one of the most fragile democracies in the world. And President Obama reiterated that, "consistent with our agreement with the Iraqi government, all of our troops will be out of Iraq by the end of next year."

For many who disagreed with the war from the start, it's not quick enough. For some on the ground, like Iraq's top Army general, it's too soon. But all indications out of the Pentagon currently are that the troop drawdown has begun and will continue on schedule.

"I am proud of the work done by our service members," said Rep. Tim Walz. "The Iraqi people have been given a golden opportunity, paid for by the service and in some cases, the lives of our military members and now it is up to the Iraqis to determine their own future."

"America's investment in Iraq has been enormous - more than 4,400 American lives, tens of thousands of wounded service members, and nearly \$1 trillion in war costs," Rep. Betty McCollum said.

"With so much sacrifice by millions of U.S. troops and their families, Iraqis must find the political will and leadership to successfully re-build their country. The security of Iraq is now in their hands."